

Inspection of SPS Training Solutions Limited

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 July 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

SPS Training Solutions Limited (SPS) was formed in 2003 and is an independent learning provider based in Stevenage. It specialises in helping people to gain the skills they need to secure employment. SPS has contracts to provide traineeships to both adult learners and learners aged 16 to 18, with the first learners aged 16 to 18 joining the programme in January 2022. Currently, there are six learners aged 16 to 18 and 12 aged 19 to 24 on the traineeship programme. Most of these are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Most have also experienced considerable disruption to their education. No learners have high needs funding.

SPS provided education and training remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is now re-introducing face-to-face delivery, both in learners' workplaces and at its learning centres in Stevenage, Hertford and Bedford. SPS works with two sub-contractors to provide the traineeship programme. In addition to providing traineeships, SPS has contracts with a range of organisations, such as local authorities and further education colleges, and has partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and youth offending teams to provide pre-employment courses.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners benefit from a calm and supportive environment. They are encouraged to become more confident individuals and to communicate more effectively with others. Learners enjoy their work placements, which are carefully chosen to match their interests and needs.

Learners experience a culture of high expectations, for example, in gaining employment skills, such as punctuality. Tutors and work placement supervisors support them effectively to develop the positive attitudes and behaviours that are expected for their next steps into employment or further training. Learners behave well. They are courteous and polite to others, including those they meet in their work placements.

Tutors encourage learners throughout their traineeship to recognise the progress they have made from their starting points. Over time, learners become more self-aware and self-confident, taking pride in their achievements. They are very appreciative of the opportunity the traineeship provides to progress towards their intended career.

Learners feel safe at the learning centres and in their work placements. They know to whom they can report any concerns they may have at any time. They appreciate the strong personal support and encouragement that leaders and tutors give them. Most learners progress successfully on to their next steps in education or employment.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders work highly effectively with a very extensive range of employers and partners. These include community partners, local authorities, charities, colleges, youth services and youth offending teams, as well as strategic regional bodies, such as the local enterprise partnership. Leaders take particular care to understand changing local and national skills and employment needs. Leaders have shaped a relevant curriculum, which is ambitious for the learners and responds appropriately to the needs of employers. The traineeship provision offers a route to employment in their chosen field to disadvantaged learners. The learners face multiple barriers to securing employment, such as criminal records, learning disabilities and difficulties, mental health issues, physical disabilities and poor English skills.

Learners benefit from a well-balanced curriculum. Leaders identify a clear and logical rationale for the sequencing of the different components of the traineeship. They work closely with tutors to individualise the curriculum to meet the needs of each learner. For example, learners often begin their programme with their work placement. As a result, learners are motivated to learn, including those who have been unemployed or out of education for some time. Learners enjoy their learning and most stay on their programmes.

Learners develop the good skills and positive attitudes that employers look for. For example, most learners attend punctually. In their placements, they carry out meaningful work which is valued by their employer. As a result, they gain good practical skills as well as a deeper understanding of employment. For example, learners at a football club carry out increasingly complex maintenance tasks around the pitches, using different pieces of equipment.

Learners gain the important knowledge, skills, and behaviours they need for their future lives. Tutors regularly assess learners on their progress through the programme. Most tutors provide prompt, precise and encouraging feedback to motivate and encourage learners to improve. For example, in hair and beauty, the tutor gave detailed feedback, including a reminder to check spelling and grammar throughout their work. The tutor then highlighted areas where further development could improve the standard of work. For example, by asking the learner to identify which special products could be adapted for the client, such as eye creams or serums.

Tutors support learners effectively in improving their skills in English and mathematics, and in gaining an award at the appropriate level. Learners complete a thorough initial assessment of their existing skills. This helps tutors to identify and target those areas that need further development. Tutors carefully focus their sessions on meeting the identified gaps in learners' knowledge and skills. On their work placements, learners improve their spoken communication skills and become more confident in speaking with others. Leaders recognise that learners have often lost ground in developing their English and mathematics skills and have gaps in their learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To remedy this, leaders have created additional skills development workshops, for example, in mathematics. However, the development of English and mathematics skills is considered a separate component of the programme. Developing these skills is not yet fully integrated into the wider curriculum. As a result, a few learners do not develop their written skills sufficiently while on their work placement. For example, workplace managers do not always correct learners' errors in their writing, such as spelling and punctuation, in their weekly records of work placement. Consequently, learners repeat the same mistakes and do not improve their skills quickly.

Tutors support learners effectively in preparing for their next steps. They encourage learners to reflect on their personal growth at each stage of their programme and in reviews. Tutors encourage learners to progressively refine their longer-term ambitions for the future and also to consider their next steps on their journeys. As learners move through the programme, their experienced tutors suggest and discuss possible pathways. For example, tutors suggest moving on to higher-level awards or progressing to an apprenticeship or other college course. In other instances, tutors use online resources to make learners more aware of potential careers. The careful choice of placement for each learner is a significant factor in enabling learners to successfully complete their traineeships and to achieve a route to their chosen career. It is only in these carefully selected environments that, with high levels of support and encouragement, learners are able to follow their interests and to overcome their barriers.

The traineeship provides a minority of learners with opportunities to become active citizens. For example, a few learners volunteer at the food bank located at the premises of the employer where they are on placement. As learners grow in confidence and communication skills through the traineeship, they are better positioned to take on such roles going forward. However, tutors do not strongly and regularly encourage them to do so.

Leaders have put appropriate arrangements in place to manage and quality assure the work of their sub-contractors. There is a clear and appropriate rationale for sub-contracting. Leaders have good working relationships with their sub-contractors. They provide appropriate support to them. There is some sharing of good practice, for example, in shared observation training. However, there is much more good practice yet to share. For example, both sub-contractors develop learners' English and mathematics skills while on work placement more extensively than SPS. One sub-contractor makes excellent use of scenario testing for safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty topics. One sub-contractor has introduced an application to help learners to improve their employability skills.

Governance arrangements are limited. While leaders have not as yet established a governing body, several organisations that sub-contract work to SPS provide extensive and effective external scrutiny of the quality of provision. Each of these regularly scrutinises compliance with statutory duties, policies and procedures, the progress and achievement of learners, self-assessment, quality assurance and quality improvement arrangements. However, there is no external support and challenge regarding strategic direction and decision making.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established an effective culture of safeguarding. They take great care to ensure that learners are safe in their work placement. Leaders take into account any health related and other challenges faced by individual learners. Leaders place learners aged 16 to 18 on a risk register and monitor their well-being carefully. Tutors check that learners are safe and feel safe at induction, and make them aware of what to do if they have any concerns.

Leaders ensure that staff, including those at sub-contractors, complete safeguarding training. They ensure that staff receive regular updates about current national and local safeguarding concerns, for example concerns regarding sexual harassment and online sexual abuse between learners.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that learners are effectively supported in developing their English and mathematics skills during their work placements.
- Leaders should ensure that as learners grow in confidence, they are encouraged to become more active citizens, for example, through undertaking voluntary activities, and to further develop their personal interests and hobbies.
- Leaders should ensure that comprehensive governance arrangements are put in place, covering all required aspects of external scrutiny. This should include independent support and challenge with strategic decision making.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1270851
Address	Bowmans House, Bessemer Drive Stevenage SG1 2DL
Contact number	07966 162040
Website	www.sps-training.com
Principal/CEO	Mehul Shah
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Halls of Ivy SSG Training

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Quality Manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous monitoring visit report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Christine Leeding, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Winchcombe	Ofsted Inspector

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